



NEWS

from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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PROPOSALS SUBMITTED FOR THE 1997 CITES CONFERENCE

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Director John Rogers today announced that new proposals to regulate the trade of plants and animals around the world are being submitted to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The Service is submitting the United States' listing proposals and implementation resolutions to the CITES Secretariat in Switzerland in preparation for the biennial meeting of CITES countries to be held this June in Harare, Zimbabwe. With 134 member countries, CITES is the world's most widely accepted conservation agreement.

"Although CITES has been in effect for more than two decades, the treaty looks to the future by encouraging the world community to use its shared natural resources responsibly," Rogers said. "CITES recognizes trade in animals and plants and their products are part of the global economy but also serves as a mechanism to prevent abuse of our planet's living resources."

The United States is proposing several animals and plants for inclusion on CITES Appendices I and II at the upcoming meeting. Appendix I lists 700 species threatened with extinction due to international trade. CITES bans all commercial trade in Appendix I species but does allow noncommercial trade (such as for scientific research) if such trade does not jeopardize the species' chances for survival. Permits are required for the exportation and importation of Appendix I species.

Species listed on Appendix II are those not immediately threatened with extinction but which may become so if trade is not controlled. Countries may allow exportation of Appendix II species if trade is not detrimental to a listed species' survival in the wild or its role in its ecosystem and involves only legally obtained specimens. Export permits are necessary.

Among the species being proposed are:

Appendix I: all species of sawfishes, the green-cheeked parrot, and the yellow-headed parrot. Closely related to sharks, sawfishes inhabit shallow marine waters and are best known for their long snouts which look like saws. Worldwide, there are seven species, most of which are highly endangered due in part to the collection of the "saws" for the tourist curio trade. The

two parrot species, found almost entirely in Mexico, are considered threatened with extinction because of their popularity as pets and a significant illegal trade. Mexico is submitting a listing proposal that the United States is co-sponsoring.

Appendix II: Bigleaf mahogany (a major timber species), goldenseal (a medicinal plant), all 12 species of map turtles (exported for the pet trade), the alligator snapping turtle (exported for pets and food) and the timber rattlesnake (exported for leather goods and food products), and the straw-headed bulbul (a bird in the pet trade).

Bigleaf mahogany is one of the most important and valuable tropical timbers on the world market and the United States imports more than five times the amount of any other country. Bigleaf mahogany grows in Mexican, Central American, and South American rainforests. Current logging practices, both legal and illegal, have put this premier hardwood at risk in the wild.

"As the world's largest consumer of bigleaf mahogany, the United States has a responsibility to encourage sustainable management of the species," Rogers said. "It is important to note that the proposal to list mahogany in Appendix II will not prohibit trade in mahogany products. It will help ensure that mahogany entering the United States was harvested in a sustainable way and comes from legal sources. Trade in furniture and other finished products will not be subject to any new regulation or restrictions as a result of this proposal."

The Republic of Bolivia, the second largest exporter of bigleaf mahogany, will co-sponsor the United States' effort to ensure the sustainable management and protection of wild populations. "We are extremely pleased Bolivia is joining us in proposing mahogany for CITES protection," said Rogers. "The Bolivians have been working hard to protect wild stands of mahogany that are so important to their country's economy. They are actively demonstrating that we can find ways to protect, manage, and still use a valuable resource."

Alexandra Sánchez de Lozada, Bolivia's Director of the National Authority for the Conservation of Biological Diversity, said, "Our interest is founded on the actual conditions that the populations of this species present, as well as knowing the high levels of extraction and commercialization and the impact of these processes on the sustainability of mahogany. From our studies in Bolivia, we can affirm that the populations are declining, and that this is producing genetic erosion."

The United States is also proposing to include goldenseal, a woodland herb, in Appendix II. Goldenseal, which provides a well-known medicinal product, is native in the Eastern broadleaf

forests of this country and southeastern Canada. It is now considered uncommon to critically rare in at least 17 of the 27 states within its range. With some 150,000 pounds of goldenseal root collected annually from the wild, and with escalating domestic and international trade, the United States wants to ensure that trade in this species is carefully monitored and wild populations are not harmed.

For the June meeting, Germany has proposed including all currently unlisted species of sturgeon in Appendix II. Sturgeon are the source of most of the caviar consumed worldwide and some species are on the verge of extinction in the wild. Wild populations such as those of the Caspian Sea and the Volga River in Russia are now severely depleted because the adults are sacrificed in the process of collecting eggs. The United States is joining Germany as a co-sponsor of this proposal to help get a handle on the significant illegal international trade in caviar and to protect Russian sturgeon populations from exploitation. There will be no effects on sportfishing for sturgeon within the United States.

The second portion of the United States' submission deals with implementation resolutions and discussion papers. They are important in helping countries to better execute the Convention and in providing a forum for a biennial evaluation of critical wildlife trade issues. Among the 12 resolutions and 4 discussion papers are several issues pertaining to illegal trade as well as the technical implementation of the treaty.

Of particular note is the paper submitted by this country calling for the establishment of a CITES Marine Fishes Working Group, developed in close cooperation with the National Marine Fisheries Service. This group would, among other things, address CITES implementation issues for sharks and other marine fishes. The Service has identified several species of sharks that likely qualify for listing in Appendix II but has decided to defer submission of these proposals until better implementation measures are developed domestically and internationally.

Another major paper focusses on the international trade in potentially invasive alien (non-indigenous) species. Many species are released either intentionally or unintentionally and present serious problems to native wild animals and plants, agriculture, and habitats. The United States is taking the lead in calling attention to this important conservation issue by providing a forum for discussion.

The Service will publish a Federal Register notice by the end of January 1997 detailing its submissions. This spring, the Service plans to publish a Federal Register notice announcing species proposed and resolutions submitted by other member nations. The notice will detail the United States' proposed stance on these issues and call for public comment. Final United States negotiating positions for the June meeting will be published in the Federal Register in May 1997.